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ABSTRACT

This single-sheet eight panel brochure provides guidelines for parents on effective participation in meetings with school personnel to discuss their child's individualized education program (IEP). Included are an explanation of what the IEP contains; the settings in which it can be implemented; the non-academic, extracurricular, and supportive services which should be made available; how parents can prepare for the IEP meeting; specific suggestions for participating in the meeting; and procedures for pursuing legal rights in case of disagreement. (JDD)

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HOW TO PARTICIPATE EFFECTIVELY IN YOUR CHILD'S IEP MEETING

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HOW TO PARTICIPATE EFFECTIVELY IN YOUR CHILD'S IEP MEETING

As the parent of a child with special education needs, you should learn how to use the IEP (Individualized Education Program) process as an effective tool to obtain appropriate special education and related services for your child.

YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- What an IEP should consist of.
- How to prepare for an IEP meeting.
- How to write your own IEP input statement.
- How to effectively participate in an IEP meeting.
- How to use positive communication skills to build a cooperative home/school relationship.
- How to obtain appropriate special education and related services for your child through the IEP.

WHAT IS AN IEP?

Federal and State Law *(P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Article 14 of the School Code of Illinois)* mandates a FREE APPROPRIATE EDUCATION for all children with special education needs, from 3 to 21 years of age. The IEP is the specific vehicle for your child's free appropriate education. You must always keep in mind that you, as the parent, know your child better than anyone else. Therefore, your input during the IEP process is essential and invaluable.

State and Federal Law require that a written Individualized Education Program (IEP) be developed, and reviewed annually, to meet your child's unique special education needs.

The IEP is developed at a special meeting, which includes your participation and the participation of:

- Your child's teacher and another representative from the school who is qualified to provide or supervise your child's special education program.
- Your child, where appropriate.
- A member of the evaluation team, or staff member who is knowledgeable about the procedures and results of the evaluation (for a newly evaluated child).
- Other persons, of the school's or your choosing, who have a current educational interest in your child.

YOUR CHILD'S IEP SHOULD CONSIST OF:

- A statement of your child's present educational performance level.
- Annual goals for your child and short-term instructional objectives.
- Specific educational services to be provided.
- Specific related/supportive services to be provided based on determined needs, projected date and duration of these services.
- The extent, if any, of your child's participation in the regular education program of the school.
- The extent, if any, of your child's participation in the summer program.
- Appropriate criteria, evaluation procedures, and the schedules for determining annually (at least), whether instructional objectives have been achieved.

AN ANNUAL GOAL is a general statement of desired change and progress to be worked towards throughout the year. Example:

To improve self-help skills; to eliminate self-destructive behaviors; to improve understanding of basic math concepts. The number of annual goals is determined by the nature and severity of the handicap. Generally, there are between five and ten.

A SHORT-TERM INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVE is a specific statement regarding changes and progress to be achieved during the next two to three months. This is to include: the materials and methods that will be utilized; how often, and for how many minutes the objectives will be worked on; who will work with the child; and what criteria and evaluation procedures will be used to determine to what extent each goal has been achieved. Example: *To teach the child how to button his/her coat:*

The child will be required to attempt to button his/her coat before leaving the school on a daily basis. The teacher will assist the child only after the child attempts to do it himself/herself. The teacher will reward the child with praise for trying. The child will also work with a big button doll for 3 minutes, 3 times a week with assistance and verbal reinforcements from the teacher. Criteria for completion of the goal will be the ability to button the coat independently 90% of the time.

Necessary TRANSPORTATION SERVICES and vehicle adaptation should be included in the IEP. Example:

Transportation to be provided by a bus equipped with a two-way radio, and with a bus attendant.

YOUR CHILD'S IEP CAN BE IMPLEMENTED THROUGH:

- A regular class in a public school, with appropriate supportive/related services.
- A special class in a public school, with appropriate supportive/related services, as necessary.
- A special public school.
- A special education program in private day or residential school which meets state standards (if this is needed to meet your child's educational needs).
- A special home or hospital program if your child is absent from school more than two consecutive weeks.
- A special education program in a state residential facility.

YOUR CHILD SHOULD RECEIVE APPROPRIATE NON-ACADEMIC AND EXTRACURRICULAR SERVICES

- Adaptive physical education (if unable to participate in regular physical education).
- Music, art, home economics.
- Other non-academic subjects that other children in your school are receiving.
- Recreational opportunities that other children in your school are receiving.

IF YOUR CHILD NEEDS A SUMMER PROGRAM

If your child needs a summer school program, a recommendation for the program must be written into the IEP before your child can participate.

In a 1980 letter to Congressman Butler Derrick, former Secretary of Education Shirley M. Hufstedler wrote concerning summer school requirements:

"...Part B of EHA (Education of the Handicapped Act P.L. 94-142) does not mandate that all handicapped children receive special education and related services on a twelve-month basis. Part B of EHA does, however, require that each handicapped child provided special education and related services in accordance with an individualized education program developed for that child...

APPROPRIATE RELATED/SUPPORTIVE SERVICES MUST BE PROVIDED TO MEET YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS AS INDICATED IN THE IEP.

THESE CAN BE:

- Speech and language services.
- Psychological services, social work services, counseling services.
- Special readers, braillists, typists, and interpreters.
- Physical and occupational therapy, and other necessary therapeutic services.
- Consultative services.
- Supportive institutional services.
- Medical services for evaluation and diagnostic purposes, and school health nurses.
- Parent counseling and training.
- Resource centers.
- Transportation services.

The need for related services is determined by an appropriate evaluation of the child's needs. If you feel your child is in need of a specific related service, you should request an evaluation in that specific area.

The IEP should state each needed related service, the date of the initiation of the service, and the anticipated duration of the service. It should also state how many times per week, and for how many minutes the service will be rendered, and by whom. The IEP should also state whether the service will be provided on a one-to-one basis, in a group, or only by consultation with the classroom teacher. Example:

Physical Therapy for 20 minutes daily on a one-to-one basis with the Physical Therapist; Speech Therapy for 30 minutes daily in a group of 3 children with the Speech Therapist; Occupational Therapy on a consultation basis with the teacher 10 minutes per week.

When requesting related services, you should base your request on the premise that your child needs a given service in order to benefit from his/her educational program.

BEFORE THE IEP MEETING:

- ATTEND A CCHC SPECIAL EDUCATION RIGHTS TRAINING SESSION. (Call 312-939-3513 for more information.)
- OBTAIN A COPY OF THE *FEDERAL RULES AND REGULATIONS ON P.L. 94-142.* and your state *Rules and Regulations on Special Education.* You can request a copy from the local school district, the Dept. of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, the Office for Civil Rights, or the State Education Agency. Read pertinent portions, underline the most significant sections and make your own index of important sections for easy reference.
- REVIEW YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL RECORDS. *P.L. 94-142, the Family Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, and the Illinois Student School Records Act* insures your right to examine school records, receive an explanation of the contents, challenge the contents, and obtain copies of the records.
- PREPARE A WRITTEN STATEMENT OF YOUR INPUT FOR THE IEP MEETING. Use the language of the Rules and Regulations. Avoid using phrases like "most appropriate" or "best educational program". APPROPRIATE is the key word, and will enable you to present your position adequately. Adding other words may deflect from the focus of the meeting — which is — an appropriate educational program for your child.

SAMPLE PARENT IEP STATEMENT:

PARENT INPUT ON THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR JESSIE GREEN

- *My recommendation is for placement in a class of 4 to 5 students, with a teacher skilled in play therapy behavior management skills.*
- *The teacher and the teacher's aide need to be familiar with visual teaching techniques, since my child learns best through visual rather than auditory teaching methods.*
- *Summer school services need to be provided due to the nature and severity of my child's disabilities.*
- *Long-term goals should focus on developing my child's social skills, basic math and reading skills, and self-help and survival skills.*
- *Short-term objectives need to focus on learning how to tell time, how to read street signs, how to do the dishes, how to play a game with others, etc.*
- *I am requesting an evaluation for pre-vocational services, and for occupational therapy services.*

AT THE IEP MEETING:

- INVITE OTHERS TO ATTEND THE IEP MEETING WITH YOU. It is common for parents to feel overwhelmed and alone when confronted with a room full of professionals discussing their child in a clinical manner. Invite other parents, friends, relatives for moral support. You can provide the same support for other parents at their IEP meeting.
- THE IMAGE YOU PORTRAY MAY AFFECT HOW SCHOOL PERSONNEL REACT TOWARDS YOU. You should dress in a professional manner, with clothing that is simple but dignified. Walk into the room with confidence and introduce yourself. Bring your copies of the Rules and Regulations and other materials for reference. Remember, the school personnel are paid to work FOR you and your child.
- THE IEP MEETING SHOULD BEGIN WITH A REPORT OF YOUR CHILD'S PRESENT LEVEL OF FUNCTIONING. His/her strengths and weaknesses should be discussed. From this, the professionals and the parent(s) together should formulate the annual goals for the coming year, and the short-term instructional objectives for the immediate future (the next two to three months). Do ask questions, especially when you really don't understand what is being said. You have the right to clear explanations in layperson's language.
- LISTEN WITH AN OPEN MIND, taking special note of important points raised at the meeting. Use a tape recorder. If someone expresses resistance, explain that it is a good business procedure to tape important meetings, such as this IEP meeting. (However, remember that you must honor any request to stop the taping.)
- PASS AROUND A SIGN-IN SHEET AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING. You will then have the names of all those present, and be able to address them by name (from their position on the sign-in sheet).
- WHEN SPEAKING DURING THE MEETING, take a deep breath to help project your voice clearly and confidently, and maintain eye contact with all in attendance at all times.
- REPEAT WHAT YOU ARE ASKING FOR AS OFTEN AS NECESSARY. Remember that you are not at the IEP meeting to discuss the limitations of the school budget. You are there to determine what your child needs to have an appropriate education.

IF YOU DISAGREE:

- IF YOU CANNOT COME TO AN AGREEMENT, are running out of time, or need time to consider the situation, you have the right to request another meeting. Do not feel pressured to make a decision on the spot.
- YOU MAY OBTAIN AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION and request another meeting based on the new evaluation.
- REMEMBER THAN FEDERAL AND STATE LAW DO NOT REQUIRE THAT YOU SIGN THE IEP. If you do not agree, simply sign your name and write after it "attended meeting, but not in approval of the IEP". (For more information on what to do when you do not agree, see the INTERPRETATION OF THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM published by the Dept. of Education in the Federal Register of January 19, 1981.)
- IF SCHOOL PERSONNEL REFUSE TO INCLUDE NEEDED SERVICES IN THE IEP, or follow recommendations from an independent evaluation, you may file for a Due Process Hearing and/or mediation, file a written complaint with the Office for Civil Rights, and/or contact the Dept. of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

BE SURE TO ASK FOR A COPY OF THE IEP. THE IEP MAY BE REVISED AT ANY TIME IF YOU SO REQUEST. It must be reviewed at least annually.

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